BULLETIN No. 1
FEBRUARY 1996

AUTONOMOUS REFUGEE CENTRE HACKNEY

ARCH

SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

On February 5th, the day that all benefits were cut off to large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees, a building in Hackney was squatted to house those made homeless by these new regulations. We've named it ARCH - Autonomous Refugee Centre Hackney.

No alternative emergency housing had been organised by those agencies receiving money from the government to do so, and what provision is planned is unlikely to be enough for the expected 2500 a month affected by these changes.

So far, just one refugee has been housed in ARCH, as the numbers are currently building up slowly, and the Refugee Council have been using the funds meant for their own hostel to pay for temporary accomodation. But the trickle will turn into a flood as, in the months ahead, more new refugees arrive to face the new regulations, and those in accomodation lose their benefits, and thus their homes.

This action has raised the pressure on those paid agencies who are supposed to be doing something, and has helped raise the issue, not just in terms of the need for housing, but in terms of general practical support for those facing destitution and deportation.

UP IN COURT

The building, the Old Court House at 82 Stoke Newington Road, N16, has been empty since 1992, and was bought in January 1994 by a property company, Harinbrook Properties Ltd. who have done nothing but remove those parts easiest to sell. They tried twice to evict ARCH illegally, failing both times thanks mainly to support from the local Turkish and Kurdish community, and eventually the intervention of the police.

The owners have now been to court, and the building will probably be evicted soon, but we will be moving to a better, more secure building to continue the struggle.

WHY BOTHER? IT'S GOING TO BE EVICTED ANYWAY!

It's really quite simple. The government is trying to drive refugees out of the country by putting them on the streets and starving them. The charities that "speak out" for the refugees are coming up with horror stories, statistics, and appeals for funds.... And providing plastic sheets and telling people how to sleep on the streets! We think we've got a better solution: There's lots of empty properties, more than enough for all the homeless and the refugees.

The point behind ARCH at the moment, is to build networks of people and groups who will be involved in squatting houses and social space, as part of the resistance to the persecution of refugees. Squatters - i.e. most of us involved so far - don't have widespread contacts with refugee groups/refugees; we don't have the resources to feed and shelter very many people; and we don't have the numbers to do it all ourselves.

The Courthouse was not the ideal building - we chose it for its location rather than its suitability. But it is a start, and it is a place to come and get involved. If individuals and groups come down, stay, talk and discuss ideas we can learn a lot from each other, and build a network capable of setting up other spaces for refugees. If you think that squatting big buildings or flats/houses is going to be important in resisting the attacks on refugees, come along and learn more about it. Its a lot more fun than listening to someone talk about it in a meeting.

During the occupation we've learnt a lot about what needs doing, and how to do it. We've started to develop our contacts among those affected, and with others organising to resist this attack. ARCH is already supported by refugee, church, trades union, college, and community groups.

By the time you see this we'll have a few more days in the Courthouse, and then we'll be moving on to the next place. But the point of this is to find out what people are prepared to do. We think we have a real possibility of frustrating the government's plans. We haven't heard any better ideas.

Now we need to come together with all those who have said how bad the attacks on refugees are, and take real effective action. ARCH, wherever it is, is at the very least a place to start from.

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Supported by:- Squatters Action for Secure Homes ★ Hackney Squatters' Collective ★ Colin Roach Centre ★ Hackney NUT ★ Hackney Refugees And Migrants Support Group ★ College of NELondon ★ Turkish/Kurdish Anarchist 5th May Group ★ Haringey Solidarity Group ★

HOMES FOR REFUGEES
HOMES FOR ALL

SQUATTING IS STILL LEGAL

Despite the Criminal Justice Act, squatting is still not a criminal offence.

Squatting means occupying empty property, and once you're inside and control entry (have your own lock on the door), it's then up to the owners to take civil legal action to get you out if they wish to regain "possession" of their property.

The main problems are: getting caught doing criminal damage to get in (which is a criminal offence); flats or houses where there is a tenant due to move in (they can get you out almost immediately); and private owners, who can be unpredictable, and sometimes act illegally (as confirmed by Harinbrook's actions at ARCH).

Otherwise you can expect to get a few months on average, not the most secure of accommodation, but you can be lucky and get longer. Also pressure can probably be brought to bear on some landlords under these circumstances.

As asylum seekers could possibly get detained without having committed a crime, it would of course be better for others to actually open up places, and be around as much as possible afterwards.

For more information contact Advisory Service for Squatters on 0171 359 8814.

DON'T JOIN US DO IT YOURSELVES!

While ARCH needs support, people, bedding, food, money.... support also needs to be organised in all other districts too. We can help set up other local groups, put people in touch with those who we know have the necessary skills and interest, and help co-ordinate this response and struggle; but we can't be everywhere.

Buildings need to be opened up: large buildings for housing, feeding and meeting space: as well as flats and houses, preferably within existing communities where people can have support from their neighbours.

We also need to bring together other forms of practical support: including the defence of homes that refugees already have but which are threatened by this attack; legal and illegal support and advice to help keep people in the country; organising to cover for services denied to asylum seekers (as well as fighting for their access to services that do exist); translation; etc....

DIs-grace!

Hackney Labour MP, Diane Abbot left the Halkevi Centre immediately after making her speech at the Februaury 19th meeting against the Asylum Bill. Noticing her leaving, a group of people followed her outside, having wanted to ask her about her stance in the House of Commons. She seemed to be in a great rush, with no time for peoples' queries. Politely asked by a journalism student, if it was true that she'd abstained in the vote on the new laws, our Di got very angry, and bellowed, "NO!" The same woman then asking whether that meant that she'd in fact voted against, she gave another, quieter, "No", running away without further explanation.

Di perhaps wasn't the single Labour MP who voted against, then?

ARCH

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☎ 0171 241 1951

Mail address: c/o The Colin Roach Centre, 56 Clarence Rd. E5.

Contact for new address after eviction: SQUASH 0171 226 8938